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**Lectionary citations:**

Job 38:1-7, (34-41)

Psalms 104:1-9, 24, 35c

Isaiah 53:4-12

Psalms 91:9-16

Hebrews 5:1-10

**Mark 10:35-45**

We've had two weeks of tough Gospel readings, divorce and being saved. We continue to lift up and bless. God's economy is that we are to share. For everything we have, everything we do, everything we are, is a gift from God. It's a gift from God and it's meant to be shared. We're to share from our first fruits, not the dregs that are left over.

On Sunday Zebedee's children James and John approached Jesus. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to grant our request."

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There are actually three verses missing between last week's section from Mark 10 and the passage we have today. Perhaps the lectionary compilers leave them out because we have already heard something very similar in the passages for **Lent 2** and **Proper 19**; perhaps it is because the crux of this passage is often seen as being the final verse, with everything else being primarily a vehicle to get us to that point. However verses 32-34 are actually critical in setting the context for this exchange between Jesus, James, and John because they connect it into an important sequence which Mark uses to clarify and sharpen the understanding of his readers. We have already noted in previous reflections Mark's consummate skill as a story teller and the way in which he takes his readers on a journey which gradually discloses the hidden truth about Jesus and about the nature of his Messiahship and Kingdom (both rather different to the traditional expectations). Along the way he has various different ways of snagging our attention and jolting us into a shift of perspective. The

obtuseness of the disciples is one of a number of narrative devices he uses to further this end.

Today's passage is one of a set of three in the central section of Mark's Gospel (8:22 – 10:52) in which Jesus predicts his suffering and death. Threefold repetition in which each reiteration expands the detail and thus amplifies the message is a characteristic Marcan manoeuvre. Thus Mark 8:31 tells us simply that Jesus will suffer, be rejected, killed, and rise again; 9:31 adds in the element of betrayal; and 10:32 brings the further details of mocking, spitting and scourging. The first two of these passion predictions are also associated with significant events – Peter's confession of Christ in Chapter 8 and the Transfiguration in Chapter 9 (and perhaps this latter is also in the minds of James and John here: their request to be on the right and left hand of Christ in glory immediately calls to mind Moses and Elijah in the mountain top event). However on each occasion the disciples respond in a way which shows how completely and utterly they have failed to understand the nature of either Jesus' kingship or his Kingdom. This failure is perhaps particularly striking here following as it does not just Jesus' most explicit description of his coming humiliation and death, but also his exchange with the rich young ruler (and its implicit call for the dismantling of systems based on wealth power and privilege – see further at **Proper 23**), and his statement that the Kingdom of God belongs to 'such as these [little children]' i.e to those with no power or position. Mark's technique of stringing together a series of different and yet connected episodes like this (known as parataxis) is another of his characteristic techniques and here it serves to throw into very sharp relief the lack of understanding of the disciples.

If we look at these three related stories we can see that different factors are at work in their failure to grasp what Jesus is trying to tell them: pre-commitments to

particular understandings of the Messiah; a preoccupation with, and focus on, particular social aspects and dimensions such as status and the location of power; and a complete blindness to the fundamentally paradoxical nature of the Kingdom of God as revealed by Jesus, in which greatness inheres not in exacting service from others but in giving it.

In each instance we also see Jesus (like Mark himself) use different tactics in an effort to help them to a correct understanding of the situation: thus in Mark 8 (31; 34-8) we find him explaining clearly and explicitly what being the Messiah is going to entail both for himself and for those who follow him; in the following chapter (Mark 9: 35-37) he offers only a minimal commentary but instead uses a (physically present) child as a visual illustration of what he wants them to grasp. The episode in today's Gospel sees him using (and then inverting) a more sociological framework in which to set his explanation about the nature of the Kingdom.

One can imagine how frustrating these exchanges might sometimes have been for Jesus (think back to your charades/pictionary exercise), but eventually (long after the reader of Mark's narrative) we know that the disciples *do* get it: with the resurrection, the most powerful clue of all, the penny will eventually drop and James and John will at last understand what sharing in the baptism – the full immersion of Jesus in the life and dynamics of the world – really means.

As I suggested in the introduction, it is from seeing how Jesus attempts to shift the perspective of his disciples, and how Mark approaches the same task with his readers (as for example in connection with these passion prediction passages), rather than the *specific* subject matter of today's reading, that we can draw some useful insights to help us pinpoint things which can impede progress in understanding and resolving conflicts.

Understanding the different narratives involved is an important part of understanding the shape of any conflict and of seeing the different possibilities for how resolution might be worked towards. However – just as was the case with the disciples in these three episodes – sometimes our preconceptions and pre-commitments hinder our capacity to properly or fully understand something; or they can keep us rooted in a perspective which prevents us from appreciating other possible interpretations of a situation; at other times we can miss something in plain sight because our attention is firmly held by something else – an idea, task, or relationship for example – on which we are fixated.



Just as with the optical illusions we looked at in preparation, different things may be required in order to show

us our blindspots, bring about a change of perspective, or draw our attention away from a specific focus so that something which was formerly invisible to us can come into view. Sometimes what is needed is a clear explanation; sometimes something visual or non-verbal in other ways can be useful. Occasionally we may need something unexpected which jolts the consciousness into a change of perspective; at other times we may need to very deliberately help people (or be helped ourselves) to break out of a fixity of attention to the small or specific which is preventing us from seeing what is happening in the bigger picture

It can also be useful to think carefully about the way in which we present any material we use in situations where we are trying to work towards better understandings in a conflict situation. As we have noted here and previously, Mark uses many different techniques – some at the meta level (e.g. in the framing of his overall narrative arc) and some within the individual sections or

stories themselves – as a way of drawing his readers' attention to specific areas, reinforcing important points, encouraging leaps of understanding, and helping the making of connections. Similarly if we are to maximise the chances of reaching a better mutual understanding we also may also need to use a range of different techniques to clarify positions, facilitate question formation, or stimulate constructive discussion. Understanding a conflict narrative/situation can involve a complex journey and there simply is no one-size approach which will cover and cater for every situation; moreover understanding is very rarely reached at the first attempt: application, persistence, and imagination of the kind displayed by both Jesus and Mark are vital elements in any attempt to facilitate progress towards it.



**LEARN FROM THE MISTAKES OF OTHERS. YOU CAN'T LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO MAKE THEM ALL YOURSELF.**

-CHURCH SIGN

Every good thing ... fun time ... happy event ... every laugh, smile and twinkle in our eyes ... every victory ... every celebration ... every sunny day ... every sip of cider ... they all fall into the "little bonus" category of what makes us joyful and they are free.

-KatieD

**Ears ... Lips ... Heart**

(Big blessings coming through little things) Watch for and appreciate those 'little things'.



**THERE ARE NO WRONG TURNS,  
ONLY UNEXPECTED PATHS.**

-Church Sign

The holiest moment of the church service is the moment when God's people--strengthened by preaching and sacrament--go out of the church door into the world to be the church. We don't go to church; we are the church.

-Ernest Southcott